DMI PRODUCTIONS

Regular readers know that, whilst many think creativity is an art, we're quick to argue it's more a science... Nevertheless, there are times when even the most habitually creative people can't do their best work. Here are some of the things that stop creativity dead in its tracks – and what to do about them!

Bad Brainstorming

Of all the ways to stop people producing ideas and solving problems, this may very well be the most common. Consider this: if you have a lot of people who aren't very good with musical instruments, how much better do you think they'll sound if you put them all in one room and say, "Okay - start playing!"? Sounds like a ridiculous thing to do, right? Well, it's exactly the same as brainstorming: putting together people who don't produce ideas as individuals in the hope that they'll suddenly do better in a group! It simply doesn't work. We've written an Info Sheet on why, and how to do Better Brainstorming that you can read here...

Lack of Clarity

An astonishingly common mistake is to expect people to have a high-quality output regardless of the quality of input. But think about the creative part of the mind as being like a computer – and remember the old programming adage: "Rubbish in, rubbish out!" It's important because it increasingly seems that ill-defined, confused problem outlines are given in the mistaken belief that they'll serve as a launch pad for "blue-skies thinking". They won't. If you want other people to come up with a solution or idea, it's better to clearly identify a goal. Take a look at the Info Sheet 'Interests and Positions' to learn more.

Throwing Out The Baby...

...With The Bath Water! Whole books have been written on the best ways to get more out of the creative part of your mind, and many a chapter is devoted to how detrimental negative thinking is. Of course, criticism has its place: rigorous examination of ideas is absolutely necessary – but it must come at the right time.

More subtle than this, though, is the issue of fault-finding in an idea before it's had time to take shape. Think about it this way: would you consider it reasonable to hope that in the same instant someone has a brand-new idea they'll also be able to immediately foresee and solve every single issue that could possibly ever be associated with it? Of course not! And it sounds blindingly obvious when we spell it out like this...

Nevertheless, we often hear some tiny, knee-jerk reaction become a major talking point, if not the absolute downfall, of good ideas. As an interesting – if vague – example of throwing out the baby with the bath water, here's what 'The Telegraph Company' told Alexander Graham Bell when they turned down his patent for the telephone – the telephone, mind you:

"Working with DMI is made that much easier by their structured and organised job processes"
Laura Marshall, Seven Stones

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"Why would any person want to use this ungainly and impractical device when he can send a messenger to the telegraph office and have a clear written message? This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication."

A shame for them that these folk didn't start working on the shortcomings instead of rejecting the whole idea! Can you even imagine?! So if you want new ideas, our advice is to focus on getting new ideas, not judging them. When you're later eliminating ideas from a list, be more critical. But they must be two separate processes – we've written about this in more detail here.

Environmental Problems

This seems so obvious that we nearly didn't put it in here – and yet it's practically the scourge of the age! Don't let creativity be quashed by practical issues: people talking over each other, bad mobile phone signals, dodgy Skype link ups... And it's not limited to those things: have you ever tried to come up with an idea in a room that's freezing cold? Or boiling hot? Or when you're desperate for the toilet?! It kills creativity stone dead. Don't let it happen; think about the conditions under which people are most likely to be creative – and provide them!

The Sense It Doesn't Matter

Most people are immensely invested in their ideas; it's part of who they are... Many habitually creative people even describe ideas as being like their children! While that's a little pretentious for us, we certainly understand why people want to see their ideas flourish. If you want to put an end to that, though, then there are five things that you can convey that will kill even the most ardent enthusiasm! If you really want to stop creativity dead in its tracks, give people the impression that their ideas:

Are trivial
Aren't appreciated
Will be discarded
Won't ever get off the ground
Might be executed – but poorly

Finally, it's worth mentioning that most of the issues that stop creativity in its track are born of poor people management more than anything. For an excellent idea of how to get more creativity out of individuals and teams, take a look at the misleadingly-titled book, 'Managing Talented People' by clicking here.